

DOWNSTREAM

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Provided by
MDC Division of Watershed Management
to enhance public awareness within the watershed region

Quabbin Green: The Certification of Public Land Forestry

Meeting of many waters; the accidental wilderness; model watershed management; Mecca for many seeking solitude (and fish); drinking water source for nearly half the State and source of endless controversy. Quabbin Reservoir has added one more distinction to all of these: the first public land in the nation to earn Green Certification for its forest management practices.

What is Green Certification?

The concept originated as a way to improve harvesting practices in the tropics, but it has expanded to provide independent assessment of forestry practices throughout the world. Like the "organic" label for food, the "green" label on forest products as-

sets are harvested annually from 45,000 acres under active management, the absence of a "quota" has allowed careful, sustainable practices to prevail. The Quabbin Land Management Plan for 1995-2004 details ways in which sustainable forest management improves upon the resilience of the natural forest cover that protects the water supply.

Why Did MDC Seek Green Certification?

MDC felt that independent review of the agency's claims of sustainability would provide important assurances to an increasingly concerned public. While proud of the logging standards on Quabbin properties, MDC staff felt that a certification review could suggest further improvement of those standards. MDC

Metropolitan District Commission/
Division of Watershed Management
operations at the Quabbin Reservoir
represent the first public agency to be
"Green Certified".



sures consumers that sustainable practices brought the product to market, rather than shortsighted exploitation. A recent survey showed that 67% of the middle to upper income group had made purchasing decisions based on the desire to boycott products associated with undesirable environmental impacts.

Sustainability

Equipment restriction, stream bridging, oil spill protection, and attention to rare and endangered species are among the MDC practices that contribute to "sustainability". The practice of forestry on Quabbin is guided by principles of watershed protection, not the need to feed a sawmill or to produce a specific amount of revenue. While 3-5 million board

feet are harvested annually from 45,000 acres under active management, the absence of a "quota" has allowed careful, sustainable practices to prevail. The Quabbin Land Management Plan for 1995-2004 details ways in which sustainable forest management improves upon the resilience of the natural forest cover that protects the water supply.

Who Provides Green Certification?

The Smart Wood program, a non-profit affiliate of the Rainforest Alliance and the National Wildlife Federation, was selected to perform the Green Certification assessment. A field assessment team was brought together with MDC staff for about two weeks, during which thirty-five years of management plans, forest inventory data, and

timber harvesting records were painstakingly scrutinized. Current, past, and proposed timber harvesting lots were inspected for impacts on residual resources, the productivity of the operation, and the achievement of desired silvicultural effects. Field assessment considered overall threats to forest security and health, long-term sustainability of the management approach, technical quality of forest harvesting, landscape level impacts, optimization of forest potential, effects on local communities, and economic viability of the forest operations. It was the first time any outside group had looked so intensively and objectively at MDC's forest management, and the first time Smart Wood had assessed a large public holding. In addition to the time spent directly with Quabbin staff out on the watershed, the Smart Wood team also interviewed a large cross-section of stakeholders affected directly or indirectly by Quabbin's forest management practices. The assessment process and draft findings were presented to Quabbin's Science and Technical Advisory Committee, and a public presentation of the process was delivered following a 600 piece mailing to an even wider spectrum of potential stakeholders.

Detailed results of the certification assessment are available in a final report from Smart Wood. This report contains scores and comments on nearly 100 criteria. Scoring on applicable criteria can range from "extremely weak performance" (a score of 1) to "state of the art" (a score of 5). Quabbin practices were rated 4 or 5 for all but two criteria, which were rated 3 (certifiable, above the norm). For practices that are state of the art, the assessment makes non-binding recommendations to improve or sustain current conditions. For others, there are conditions attached, which must be met within a short time in order to maintain certification. An example at Quabbin includes the requirement that future harvests involving chipping must leave behind sufficient coarse woody debris to meet biological requirements of the site (in short, chipping operations were too clean at Quabbin). There is a requirement to investigate the value of establishing landscape "links" between some of the isolated areas on Quabbin that have been removed from management for various reasons (too wet, too steep, etc.). A related condition requires that MDC identify and protect unusual areas, for example, scattered small stands of extremely old tupelo at

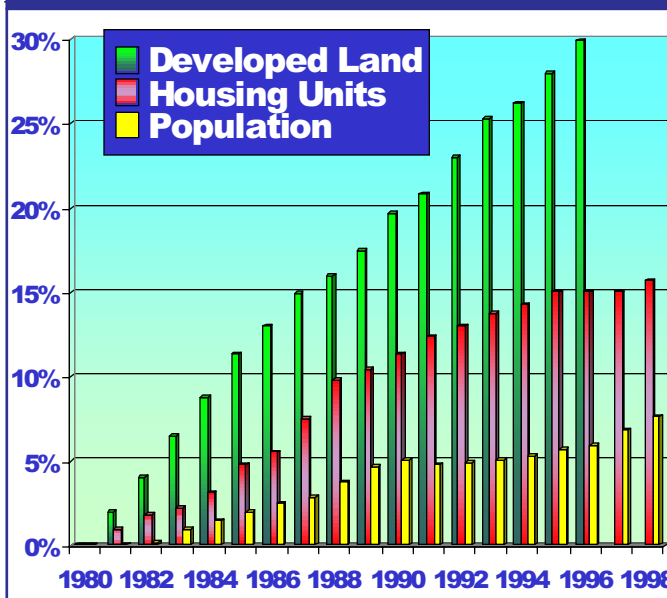
Quabbin Green: (continued on Page 3, column 2)

Understanding Sprawl

Sprawl: it's a word that is being more and more widely used to describe the changing landscape here in central Massachusetts. The effects suburban sprawl has on the visual landscape, natural resources, community character, and local finances can be extreme. But what is sprawl? Before we can try to address the issue, we need to first understand what it means.

Put simply, sprawl is excessively consumptive land use. Consider these figures: from 1950-1980 the state's population grew 28% , while the amount of developed land increased 188%. We have developed more than double the amount of land since World War II than we did in the previous 300 years.

Cumulative Percent Change in Numbers of Residents, Housing Units, and Acres of Developed Land in Massachusetts (from a 1980 baseline).



Figures and statistics adapted from the Massachusetts Audubon Societies publication *Losing Ground* (May 1999) and the Trustees of Reservations publication *Conserving Our Common Wealth* (June 1999).

What drives such aggressive growth? Changes over time in the market economy are the root of many of the factors that fuel sprawl. Trade and commerce have evolved from being largely local and land based (agricultural/forest/maritime communities of colonial times) to today's global technology-driven economy. The result: people are more dispersed across the landscape and less directly connected to the resources that sustain them.

Sprawl: (continued on Page 3, column 1)



The Thomas Basin at the Wachusett Reservoir on a warm day last summer.

Sprawl: (continued from Page 2, column 2)

The impacts sprawl has on neighborhoods arrive subtly, but they are deleterious and can be long lasting. Orchards that once provided apples and cider in a region are now rows of monotypic housing "units". Acres of woodlands that once accompanied travelers into town centers are being replaced by acres of asphalt parking lots and strip malls, and the narrow country roads they once abutted are being widened and straightened providing a way *through* a community rather than a way *to* a community. The increased need for services to accommodate this growth is absorbed locally, raising property values and taxes and making it difficult for long-time residents of an area to remain. Environmentally, sprawl is fragmenting habitat, altering hydrology, and removing valuable soils from production.

How is sprawl affecting your community?💧

Brandon Kibbe is the Outreach Coordinator of the Pure Water Stewardship Program which is a cooperative effort between the Mass. Watershed Coalition and the Worcester County Conservation District.

Quabbin Green: (continued from Page 2, column 1)

Quabbin, or the several hundred vernal pools on the watershed.

Why Might a Private Landowner Become "Green" Certified?

One incentive is the desire simply to distinguish one's management, no matter how small the ownership, from less thoughtful practices. Many landowners are frustrated by the stereotype that someone who cuts timber as part of a sustainable management plan is judged the same as the worst "timber beast". The desire for this type of distinction has brought many landowners into the Tree Farm and Forest Stewardship programs. A difficult question is how much will it cost the smallholder to become certified? For large holdings such as the Quabbin, the expense might average out to a dollar or two per acre, but many costs are fixed, so that the per acre charge rises dramatically as the total acreage shrinks. Smart Wood is currently developing a model that might solve this problem. A private consulting forester's management on a collection of individual private parcels would be certified, allowing brokerage of certified wood products from many clients without any of them requiring individual certification. Certifiers admit that small landowners, absolutely the norm in New England, are the most difficult certification challenge.

To learn more about the Green Certification process, contact MDC for a copy of the Quabbin report, or write to Stacy Brown, Regional Coordinator - Smart Wood Program, NWF Northeast Natural Resource Center, 58 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602. Recommended further reading includes Certification of Forest Products: Issues and Perspectives, 1996, Island Press, ISBN 1-55963-494-4.💧

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Downstream is produced twice annually by the Metropolitan District Commission/ Division of Watershed Management of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Our goal is to inform the public about Watershed Protection activities, provide a conduit for public input, and promote environmentally responsible land management practices.

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A reader asks:

Q: If my land is purchased by the MDC/DWM for watershed protection, how do I know that it won't be sold for development someday?

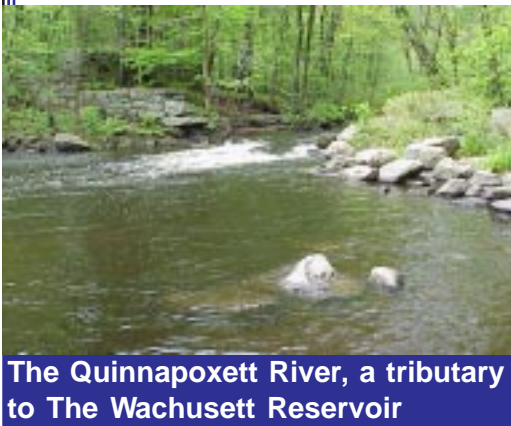
A: When land is purchased by the Commonwealth for watershed protection, it is given a special protected status under Article 97 of the State Constitution. This land cannot be converted to any other non-conservation purpose without gaining a 2/3 vote of the legislature. With current awareness of the importance of open space preservation, that is about as sure a thing as you can get to permanently keeping the land in its natural state.

This newsletter is published twice a year and includes articles of interest to landowners and residents of the MDC Division of Watershed Management watershed system communities. You are encouraged to contact us if you wish to learn more about programs and assistance available to help landowners. We value the contribution your well cared for land provides and welcome the opportunity to work with you. Please send us questions or comments which we will address in subsequent newsletters. Our address is;

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TO:



The Quinnapoxett River, a tributary to The Wachusett Reservoir